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ABSTRACT

The delivery of an argument in debate has been clearly shown to be important in facilitating the changing of attitudes favorably toward a message, in enhancing understanding of the material, and in increasing the speaker's ethos. Despite its importance, however, delivery has become dead as a communication concept in debate and is no longer a rationale used by judges to render decisions. Examination of intercollegiate debates show that rate, comprehensibility, eye contact, movement, and gestures are commonly ignored by judges when assigning wins, losses, or speaker points. The trend seems to be that debaters will continue to employ a unique delivery style until judges penalize such behavior. Some suggestions for changing this trend are: (1) include style as a major component in judging criteria; (2) establish delivery as a rule for debate; (3) shorten the competitive season; (4) limit the evidence; (5) limit the topic; and (6) encourage random judging assignments of a diversity of judges. (Nineteen notes are included.) (PRA)

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DELIVERY: AN ARCHAIC COMMUNICATION CONCEPT IN ACADEMIC DEBATE?

by

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Introduction

Debate is one of the oldest activities of mankind. It had its origins in ancient Greece in the theories of teachers like Protagoras.[1] As the art and skill of debate evolved into systematic use in the Universities of the Medieval period, its influence spread. In fact it has been stated, "It [debate] may well have been one of the most important influences in European higher education between 1140 and 1600."[2] Even today collegiate debate is practiced as a competitive activity by hundreds of universities, colleges, and junior colleges. These institutions devote a considerable amount of time, personnel, and money to their programs.

If any one advantage to debating has been consistently expressed for the last 2400 years, it has been that participation in debate will improve your ability to communicate. A major component in the communication process is delivery. Clear delivery can enhance the message by making it more interesting and vital. It aids the message's appeal to both the ear and eye of the recipient. That delivery is very important has been verified by a number of studies. The importance of effective delivery in the careers of various leaders in our society has been frequently analyzed, and numerous experiments have corroborated that fluency in delivery is important in facilitating the changing of attitudes favorably toward a message, in enhancing understanding of the material, and in increasing the speaker's ethos.[3]

Unfortunately in policy debate delivery has become the lost "canon of communication." This paper will present the position that delivery has indeed become an archaic communication concept.

This author will examine several areas of delivery to prove that delivery is no longer a rationale for judges to render decisions. The areas that will be examined will be rate and vocal inflections. The author will

then propose some potential solutions.

Rate

Some have argued that the rate of delivery and comprehension is irrelevant in a discussion of debate style. J. W. Black has expressed the claim that the structure of the English language does not demand subtle shifts in pitch, tone, and rate to infuse meaning, thereby allowing fast rates without hampering understanding.[4]

However, the critics I have talked to conclude that rate does have an impact on a listener's comprehension. Faulke and Sticht have concluded that most studies finding a significant relationship between speech rate and comprehension indicated faster rates decreased comprehension.[5]

How fast are NDT rounds? In 1981 Colbert reported that the average rate of speech in NDT final rounds had reached 270 w.p.m. by 1980.[6] In the 1984 NDT final round the average rate was found to be 279 w.p.m. with three of the eight speeches exceeding 300 w.p.m.[7]

While I could not find studies that defend the rate of delivery in NDT debates, a variety of studies have concluded that comprehension decreases as speed increases. Goldhaber and Weaver have shown that comprehension of oral messages began declining at above 175 w.p.m.[8] Rossiter concluded that comprehension scores began declining when speech rates increased from 175 w.p.m. to 233 w.p.m.[9]

With comprehension clearly decreasing as debaters spew information at judges, one wonders how a decision is rendered. After reviewing 205 judge philosophy statements compiled for the last three National Debate Tournaments the conclusion appears to be that judges are rendering decision based on their familiarity with the evidence or they read the evidence at the end of the debate.

In reading these same judge philosophies I was surprised that

only 42 philosophies mentioned rate of delivery as a determining issue in rendering a decision. Additionally, approximately 20% of the judges mentioning rate of speed in their philosophy encouraged debaters to speak at a fast rate with comments like, "I like to judge fast debates," or "I can flow anything."

It appears a logical conclusion of this section on delivery is that the rate of delivery is not important to a vast majority of judges. In fact judges have encouraged speed by reading evidence at the end of a round. The American Debate Association has taken a rules based approach to decrease the rate of delivery. Specifically, a judge is prevented from reading evidence after a debate in the hopes to restrain the rapid-fire speech so common in policy debate.[10] The impact of this rule is hard to declare because of violation.

The unfortunate outcome of this increase in the rate of delivery has been that this behavior is actually counter-productive professionally to our students. Matlon and Keele conducted a survey examining skills learned by 703 former NDT participants. The data was gathered to provide insights into the impact of the debate experience on some of the most successful and distinguished students who participated in debate. One of the disadvantages most frequently identified from participation in academic policy debate that this survey identified was that former debaters learned to speak too rapidly. The stories related by these past NDT participants about the problems caused by the rate of delivery were commonplace in this survey, especially among practicing attorneys.

Comprehensibility

In utilizing his/her voice a debater is usually encouraged to utilize a delivery than enhances comprehension. More debate texts stress articulation, pronunciation, pitch, volume and vocal variety as key issues in comprehension. Unfortunately, we again find NDT debaters failing to

communicate in a comprehensive manner.

Two authors, Lynch and Morello, have stated that debate delivery is often unintelligible. [11] It has even been reported that "even the coaches of most elite teams agree that many debaters speak incomprehensibly."[12] Professor Southworth goes so far as complain that debate presentations, especially when evidence is read, are simply incomprehensible. [13] Even Professor Boaz has stated that he is frequently confronted with unintelligible phrases when transcribing audio-tapes of the NDT final round debates. [14] Comprehensibility in NDT debates appears not to exist.

To answer why this is true, I turned to the NDT judge philosophy statements, again. Of the 205 judge philosophies examined only 80 contained a statement that called for debaters to be comprehensible. In analyzing specific vocal components that would aid comprehensibility I found the following results.

- Only 6 philosophies mentioned vocal volume or projections
- Only 4 philosophies mentioned articulation or pronunciation.
- 0 philosophies mentioned vocal pitch.
- 0 philosophies mentioned vocal quality.
- 0 philosophies mentioned vocal emphasis or variety.[15]

In concluding this section it is clear that debaters are not encouraged to be comprehensible in a competitive round. There is no need with judge more than willing to reconstruct rounds by reading large quantities of evidence .

<u>Eye Contact</u>

On various occasions authors have stressed the importance of eye contact in communication . Even debate texts have stated, "the single most important element in isolation for establishing a sense of personal connection between the judge and the advocate is eye contact."[16]

On too many rounds I have judged the debaters made no attempt at eye contact for fear of losing their place in their brief. Usually cross examination is the only time the advocates look at the judge directly.

Judges obviously have decreased the need to establish eye contact by burying themselves in their "flows". The desire not to miss "anything" is the usual justification for a lack of eye contact. In the judge philosophy booklets I examined only one judge expressed the need for debaters to establish eye contact during the debate.

It seems no one wants to establish eye contact and the parties involved are happy with the status quo.

Posture

It is often preached that the ideal posture is to stand erect. Debaters should distribute their weight evenly on both feet and assume an alert, forward orientation of the body toward the judge.[17] To say that such a posture is often not practiced in a debate round is an understatement.

Today, debaters love to perch on one foot with their other foot on a chair and their head hunched over a flow pad. In several rounds this year I have observed debaters sitting on the back of chairs or merely sitting in a chair throughout the round.

Judges have again contributed to the lack of good posture practiced. Turning once again to the judge philosophy books, I was able to find only five statements on the need for debaters to stand during the round. It appears that posture is simply not that important in academic debate.

Movement and Gestures

The advice traditionally provided to public speakers is that gestures should be used as a means to emphasize key words and ideas. Gestures should be definite, followed through, executed at chest or eye

level (not at the belt line or below), and spontaneous movement aids in the transition between main ideas. A normal suggestion concerning movement would be not to pose like a caged lion while speaking.[18]

We do not require the use of gestures or movement by our debaters. No judge mentioned in his/her judge philosophy any specific comment concerning movement or gestures. Judges simply do not utilize gestures or movement behaviors in deciding who wins/loses a debate or the awarding of speaker points.

Suggestions

This paper has argued that there is a lack of concern for delivery during intercollegiate debate. It is appropriate that I now advance my cures.[19] Forcing debaters to improve their oral communication mannerisms will be a difficult task. The present-day style that judges accept is truly becoming ingrained in the activity.

1) Including style as a major component in judging criteria.

For too long debaters who communicate incomprehensively are awarded high speaker points and wins. A debater who presents arguments at a rationale speed and attempts to develop analysis are often dropped because too many responses were dropped in rebuttal. Furthermore, judges who rate on delivery are labeled as fools or incompetents. This must change or we will lose judges who have a positive impact on bringing rationality to debate.

2) Establish delivery as a rule for debate.

The ADA has taken a bold step in articulating the importance of delivery. Enforcement must be not only in novice and junior divisions, but also varsity. Furthermore, a judge must truly enforce delivery regulations and not merely pay lip-service to the rule.

3) A shorter season.

A survey has already revealed that there is an interest in a

shorter season. It also appears that the excess in delivery is at a low level early in the year. Perhaps the length of the season would prevent debaters from delivery mania.

4) A limit of evidence.

Today debaters have brief arguments and have folders filled with responses to the Gorbachev D.A. First affirmative speeches containing 30 - 40 pieces of evidence on a regular basis. Debaters today fill boxes with their evidence to the point where a 15-passenger van can carry only two teams due to the evidence that each team is carrying. If we limit the quantity of evidence that each team carries and have debaters record evidence on cards, the results will be to slow down the debaters.

5) Limit the topic.

In the past we have debated rather broad topics. If we limit the area of debate, debaters will have to persuade the judge that their position is superior. The net outcome would be debaters slowing down.

6) Random Judging Assignments of a Diversity of Judges.

Because tournaments employ strikes and mutual preference judging, judges who stress delivery rarely judge teams that are considered the elite of the activity. If we allow random judges, then all teams must adjust their style and adapt to a large variety of critics. When judges realize that their views will no longer condemn then to judge weak teams or sit on the sidelines, they will no longer be afraid to vote against teams they cannot understand.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the areas of delivery e.g. rate, comprehensibility, eye contact, movement and gestures. The judges of NDT debate have decided to ignore the factors in assigning wins/loses or speaker points.

The trend seems to be that debaters will continue to employ a unique delivery style until judges begin to penalize such behavior. Some suggestions were advanced by the author.

Judges do not seem interested in regulating delivery in rounds. Thus, delivery is presently dead is a communication concept in debate and unlikely to be resurrected in the near future.

Endnotes

1. James J. Murphy, "Two Medieval Textbooks in Debate," Journal of the American Forensic Association, (January , 1964), p.1.

2. Ibid., p.2-3.

3. For a summary of some studies see McCroskey, An Introduction to Rhetorical Communication, 3rd eds.; Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1978, pp.183-188, and Sproule, Argument : Language and Its Influence, McGraw-Hill, pp. 256-258.

4. J.W. Black, "Speech Intelligibility : A Summary of Recent Research," Journal of Communication, 11 (1961), pp.87-94.

5. E. Foulke and T.G. Sticht, "A Review on Research on Intelligibility and Comprehension of Compressed Speech," Psychological Bulletin, 72. (1969), pp. 50-62.

6. K.R. Colbert, "Speaking Rates of N.D.T. Finalists from 1968-1980," Journal of the American Forensic Association, 18 (1981), pp. 73-76.

7. J.K. Boaz, "A Footnote to William Southworth's Critique of the Final Round of the 1984 National Debate Tournament," Journal of the American Forensic Association 21 (1984), pp. 119-122.

8. G.R. Goldhaber and C.H. Weaver, "Listener Comprehension of Compressed Speech When the Difficulty, Rate of Presentation and Sex of the Listener are Varied," Speech Monographs, 35 (1968), pp. 20-25.

9. Rositer's study was reported in C.H. Weaver, Human Listening, Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1972, p.146.

10. See ADA Standing Rules of Tournament Procedure, 1991-p.2.

11. See J. Lynch, "Some Reflections on Debate in the 1970's, "Speaker and Gavel, 17 (1979), pp. 37-38 and J. Morello, "Intercollegiate Debate; Ten Years of Sound and Fury Signifying Nothing," Speaker and Gavel, 17 (1979), pp. 39-42.

12. R. Rowland and S. Deatherage, "The Crisis in Policy Debate," Journal of the American Forensic Association," 24 (1988), pp. 246-250.

13. W. Southworth, " Fourth Judge Critique," Journal of the American Forensic Association, 21 (1984) pp. 53-56.

14. J.K. Boaz, " A Footnote to William Southworth's Critique of the Final Round of the 1984 National Debate Tournament, " Journal of the American Forensic Association , 21 (1984), pp. 119-122.

15. See M. Pfau, D. Thomas and W. Ulrich , Debate and Argument. Scott Foresman and Company, 1987, pp. 301-307.

16. IBID., p. 305.

17. IBID., p. 306.

18. IBID., p. 306-307.

19. For a detailed summary of potential solutions see J. Morello, "Intercollegiate Debate: Proposals for a Struggling Activity," Speaker and Gavel 17 (1980) pp. 103-107.